

CINEMA 16 FILM NOTES 1954/1955

SUNDAY BY THE SEA

Britain, 1953

MARCH

Production: Leon Clore. Direction & Script: Anthony Simmons. Camera: Walter Lassally. Editor: Lusia Krakowska. Singers: Joan Sterndale-Bennett & John Hewes. A Noel Meadow release. (15 minutes)

The pleasures of an English seaside resort as seen in a series of relaxed visual impressions, accompanied by authentic music-hall ballads. Winner of the Grand Prix, Venice Film Festival 1953.

PAUL TOMKOWICZ, STREET-RAILWAY SWITCHMAN Canada 1953 10 minutes

Produced by Tom Daly for Nat. Film Board of Canada. Director: Roman Kroitor. Camera: Lorne Batchelor. Scenario: Stanley Jackson & Roman Kroitor. Music: Robert Fleming.

The National Film Board of Canada, a government institution, is today one of the most progressive documentary film production centers in the world. This is one of their "Faces of Canada" releases, a series devoted entirely to the work of new directors whose "first films" (unlike in the U.S.) are thus government-financed. Quiet and inward-looking, this film received an honorable mention at the Edinburgh 1954 Film Festival. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this portrait of old age, is that its creator, Roman Kroitor, is only in his twenties.

JAMMIN' THE BLUES

USA, 1944

9 minutes

A Warner Bros. release, directed by Gjon Mili. Photography: Robert Burks. With Jo Jones, Illinois Jacquet, Sidney Catlett, Lester Young, Red Callender & Marie Bryant.

Gjon Mili is a noted American still photographer best known for his stroboscopic pictures in LIFE magazine. During the war, he made this short subject for Warner Bros., although it is difficult to understand how he was able to find this much experimental freedom in a major studio. While it is somewhat contrived, Mili's inventive cutting, enormous close-ups and unusual compositions make it a true and rare example of experimental work financed by a major studio.

THE ELSTREE STORY

Britain, 1953

50 minutes

Produced by Gilbert Gunn & Pathé Documentary Unit for Associated British Picture Corp. Camera: Stanley Grant. Direction: Gilbert Gunn. Editor: Richard Best.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

A LIMITED NUMBER OF TICKETS FOR STANLEY KRAMER EVENT ARE AVAILABLE AT DESK OUTSIDE to those members who have not as yet requested them. You must obtain this special admission ticket to attend this event(scheduled for Tuesday, April 19th at 8:00 PM).

WE REPEAT: DATE OF 'SEARCH FOR LOVE" SPECIAL EVENT CHANGED from March 29 & 30 to April 26 & 27. Change the date on your membership card now while you think of it.

"THE ELSTREE STORY records the history of one of Britain's largest film studios from the silent era to the present day. While it is not very profound in its commentary of changing styles and in its appraisal of the Elstree films, it far transcends the typical "Flicker Flashback" species of peeps into the past. The extracts from films are long enough for a reasonably accurate impression to be formed, and they are linked by interesting shots of a huge studio busily engaged in the manufacture of film. All in all, THE ELSTREE STORY provides a good cross-section of the thrillers, the comedies, the musicals and the dramas that were typical British boxoffice fare in the early and mid-thirties. This was a most interesting period at Elstree, with directors and technicians from Germany hard at work behind the cameras, and stars imported from Sweden, America and other countries, busily emoting in front of the cameras, for this was a period when Britain was trying earnestly, but not too successfully, to capture a substantial portion of the world market. It is a little sad to note that as the years rolled by and the production values increased, the star rosters became more impressive and Technicolor supplanted black-and-white more and more, the Elstree product seemed steadily to lose a lot of the early vigor and inventiveness. On the whole the studio remained faithful to its policy of essentially "popular" entertainment. It is perhaps because of this "middle road" policy that most of its newer productions are comparatively little known here; not of art-house calibre, they are yet too staid and essentially British to capture a wider, less specialized audience in the U.S."

William K. Everson

THE CHARM OF LIFE

France

17 minutes

Production: Jean Gremillon. Direction: Jean Gremillon and Pierre Kast. Camera: Maurice Pecquex and Gaston Muller. Narration: Rex Harrison. Pictura Films

First prize, Venice International Film Festival 1950. "Kitsch" is delightfully spoofed in this sophisticated satire of "official" French painting at the turn of the century. Significantly, all the works shown here were recognized masterpieces at a time when the paintings of Cezanne, Renoir and Picasso were being laughed off the walls. In this film the tables have been turned: Official art and "appropriate" salon music of the period are used in delicate satire to portray the foibles, conventions, fashions and sexual mores of French society at the turn of the century. While using them satirically, the director has come so close to the spirit of these paintings that some sentimentalists may possibly feel only nostalgia while watching the film.

LETTERS

CLYDE BRUCKMAN'S SUICIDE: "Perhaps I may take a few lines of your space to note the tragic suicide of one of the cinema's greatest comedy talents. Clyde Bruckman, director of such classics as The General, Feet First and The Man on the Flying Trapeze died on January 4th last. The man who had directed the best films of Keaton, Lloyd and Fields had had a flurry of screenplay activity at Universal in the mid-forties.

Present this coupon at lobby boxoffice of New School, 66 W. 12 St., Thurs., March 17th, 8 PM for reduced \$1.20 admission rate (\$1.80 without coupon) to C16 Film Center session: Poetry and Symbol; THE FILMS OF MAYA DEREN (Guest Speaker: Maya Deren)

Present this coupon at lobby boxoffice of New School, 66 W. 12 St., Thurs., March 24th, 8 PM, for reduced \$1.20 admission rate (\$1.80 without coupon) to C16 Film Center session: Realism and Comedy; PASSPORT TO PIMLICO (Speaker: Arthur Knight)

but in his last years could get nothing better than writing chores on mediocre two-reel comedies at Columbia. Broke, depressed and doubtless feeling (erroneously) that his work was no longer revered or even remembered, he borrowed Buster Keaton's gun and shot himself. And once again, the passing of one of Hollywood's finest architects was noted by but a couple of sparse, cold, lines in one or two trade papers. As in so many other cases, the tragedy is not alone in his passing, but also in the fact that his great talent was so shamefully neglected by an industry which, judging from the dearth of good comedies, was in great need of it." William K. Everson

CONCERNING "EL":

Bunuel's *EL* was easily the most controversial C16 event of the season, as indicated by the mixed audience reaction it received. Speaking for C16, we did not show it because we considered it Bunuel's "greatest" (it can't be the task of a film society to only show masterpieces). We presented it: a) because it had created international interest as an important example of Bunuel's commercial work in Mexico, and had won several awards (the latest at the recent "Festival International du Film de Demain" organized by the federation of the world's leading film museums) and had been widely commented on in European film magazines without being available to American audiences in an English version; b) because we found it of interest as such (especially if one considers how Bunuel's talents, preoccupations and neuroses if you please, "broke through" in what was essentially a conventional plot; and c) because we feel that there is a need for a showcase in America where unavailable, controversial films of more specialized interest can find their audience. (This is precisely why we showed it at a special rather than a regular event.)

Below are a number of typical letters received; they appear here not because we necessarily agree with any one of them, but because they indicate the problems of film society management - i.e. how to cope with differences of opinion while doing a programming job that satisfies the membership and at the same time does not violate the aims of a film society:

"The most abominable crime a selection committee could have perpetrated: an insult to my intelligence, redundant, sophomoric no matter how you dress it up with psychological semantics."

M. Fox

"I was very grateful for your showing of *EL* and that others were able to see one of the best films of this gifted director. I had seen it twice when it went around the Spanish circuit, and found your narration clarified a great deal for me. I have seen seven of Bunuel's Mexican films which have not been sub-titled, including his version of Wuthering Heights (with Wagner's "Tristan" used as background music) and El Bruto, a violent piece, well acted, with many Bunuel touches. How about a double feature of these, with narration as in *EL*, for next season?"

Norman Miller 

Present this coupon at lobby boxoffice of New School, 66 W. 12 St., Thurs., March 31st, 8 PM for reduced \$1.20 admission rate to session: Films for Personal Expression: FRAGMENT OF SEEKING, IN PARIS PARKS, CONEY ISLAND (Guest Speakers: Valentine Sherry, Shirley Clarke)

Present this coupon at lobby boxoffice of New School, 66 W. 12 St., Thurs., April 7th, 8 PM, for reduced \$1.20 admission rate (\$1.80 without coupon) to C16 Film Center session: Sur-realism: ORPHEUS by Jean Cocteau (Speaker: Parker Tyler)

"No one is going to pretend that this is one of his better films - the final scene is unnecessary and embarrassing and there are implausible transitions and psychological gaps - but for what it attempts and for what it, to a surprising degree, accomplishes, it is valuable, and we should acknowledge the very rare talent of the man who made it."
(A member who didn't sign his questionnaire)

(The following letter was received from the noted film historian and critic, Jay Leyda. Mr. Leyda is the translator of Eisenstein's Film Form and The Film Sense, and the author of the widely acclaimed THE MELVILLE LOG):

"It was sad to hear the audience's reaction to Bunuel's film, EL, for it showed an intolerance of experiences - either actual or film - outside the "normal". No preparation, no tolerance is required for the undiluted, uncompromising film work - UN CHIEN ANDALOU, for example, even gains in effect through the absence of any warning to its audience. But the film audience unusually eager for new film experiences must be willing to find them not only in such undiluted form, but also to seek them beneath the guise of traditional or commercial forms, even when the film appears to be a star's vehicle. (I'm afraid that the presence of Arturo de Cordova blinded many in the audience to the artistic presence of Luis Bunuel.) The arrival of Bunuel may be the most fortunate event in Mexico's film history. For the filtered skies and hollow subjects that won prizes abroad, he has substituted maximums of intensity, and has demonstrated with each work that the theatrically released film and its audience deserve the best that the artist can give. Cinema 16 has the obligation to show its members any film that says a new thing in a new way, and I consider it a privilege for us to have seen how in EL one determined artist has been able to mold the film-factory apparatus to his own purposes.

EL embodies some of the basic weapons of the surrealist movement - it employs melodramatic means to attack the poison of melodrama; it insults the passive audience (but not the audience's intelligence) and turns passivity into boiling, troubling thought. It is the logical successor, as Sadoul has pointed out, to one of the least compromising films ever made, Bunuel's L'AGE D'OR. Bunuel might well have found the violent behavior of the Cinema 16 audience that watched EL a vindication of his method and a proof of his success - though I must confess to personal disappointment that a supposedly sophisticated and trained and eager audience should have responded in such a "normal" way to the powerful originality and courage of Bunuel's film."

Jay Leyda

THE LARGEST COLLECTION of experimental and avant-garde films in the United States is available for rental from Cinema 16 for your home or club showing (including such favorites as Psyche, Begone Dull Care, Lead Shoes, Object Lesson, Weegee's N.Y., Glens Falls Sequence, World of Paul Delvaux) 10% reduction in rental rates for members. Write for catalog to: Dept. X, Cinema 16, 175 Lexington Avenue, NYC 16.

WE HAVE RECEIVED OVER 1000 QUESTIONNAIRES & while we won't be able to thank all of you individually, rest assured that your criticisms and suggestions will be carefully analysed and become part of our planning for next season. An analysis of your replies will appear in our May program notes; be sure to read it.

A STORY ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO STARTED C16 (and a photograph!) appear in this month's Mademoiselle. You might like to read it.

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